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GOP likely has votes to block witnesses

Impeachment trial is closer to swift acquittal as key senator sides with Republican majority

By Mike DeBonis, Seung Min Kim and David A. Fahrenthold
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON – The impeachment trial of President Donald Trump is headed for a critical vote Friday that will determine whether the Senate hears from witnesses over allegations that the president pressured Ukraine to launch investigations for his own political benefit.

But Senate Republicans are increasingly confident no new testimony will be heard and they can start on a sprint toward Trump's acquittal.

On Thursday, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she would break with Republican leadership and vote to hear witnesses. But Collins still needs three other Republicans to vote with her if new evidence is to be allowed, and it was unclear late Thursday night who, if anyone, in the party would join her.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., was considered a possible supporter of allowing testimony, but he announced minutes later that he's ready to end the trial and leave Trump's fate in the hands of voters during the upcoming election.

"Let the people decide," he said in a statement.

Some Republicans said they hoped the trial would be completed Friday with a vote to acquit Trump.

"We still feel very positive about it," said Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, the third-ranking Republican leader. "More and more members are saying, 'I'm ready to go to a final (vote). ... I've heard enough.' "

One outside possibility is that the Senate will deadlock on the question of calling witnesses. That would put Chief Justice John Roberts in the position of breaking the tie – a role Democrats are urging him to play. But there is little expectation Roberts would weigh in on such a politically thorny question and instead would allow the tie to result in no witness being

Trial continues on A10

BP bucks industry on carbon pricing

British oil giant backs cap-and-trade bill in state of Washington

By James Osborne
STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON – For years, multinational oil companies have fought back state and federal carbon pricing schemes, holding out for a nationwide carbon tax as the most equitable means of addressing climate change.

But now that strategy could be starting to buckle. The British oil giant BP is running an advertising campaign supporting cap-and-trade legislation in the state of Washington, breaking with an industry that had maintained state-by-state regulation is too costly.

The move represents a pointed statement on climate change by BP as pressure on fossil fuels increases and the oil and gas industry seeks to steer regulation in a direction that allows it to more easily adapt its business to a low-carbon economy. Just two years ago, the British oil major, which operates the largest refinery in Washington state, joined with other energy companies to defeat a ballot question that would have imposed a carbon tax there.

"We believe the world is on an unsustainable path, and where there is legislation and policy being developed is on the state level," said Phil Cochrane, senior government affairs director for BP Fuels North America. "We have decided to engage there instead of waiting for a holy grail to come together."

A spokesman for Royal Dutch Shell, which also operates a refinery in Washington but took no position on the 2018 carbon tax issue, said the company would likely sup-

Carbon continues on A8

A perfect fit for Astros?

Karen Warren / Staff photographer

Dusty Baker tries on his Astros cap after being introduced as the team's new manager by owner Jim Crane, right, on Thursday at Minute Maid Park. Baker, 70, said he's looking forward to the challenge of getting the Astros past the sign-stealing scandal that rocked the franchise and led to the firing of manager A.J. Hinch and GM Jeff Luhnow. "This is my last hurrah," he said. "This is a new beginning for us and new beginning for me." Stories and analysis on page C1.

Ex-Katy ISD chief's dissertation removed

Former superintendent's work taken down from UH archive site after plagiarism claim

By Brooke A. Lewis
STAFF WRITER

The doctoral thesis of former Katy ISD Superintendent Lance Hindt has apparently been removed from the University of Houston's archival website following a review of alleged plagiarism, renewing questions about a $750,000 payout by the suburban district to its former head.

UH launched a review in 2018 of questions about the dissertation of Hindt, who had resigned five months earlier amid an uproar over decades-old bullying allegations against him. The university said at the time that it "takes any charge of academic or research misconduct seriously and thoroughly investigates any such charge, including the allegations against Dr. Hindt."

Sean Dolan, a Katy ISD parent who brought the complaint, said he received a letter from the university Jan. 13 telling him that his allegations into research misconduct had concluded and that "a final institutional decision was reached." As of December, he said, the dissertation could no longer be found on UH's archival website. A URL that used to link to Hindt's dissertation on the university's website now shows a message that says, "Resource not found."

UH would neither confirm nor deny whether the dissertation had been taken down, citing federal privacy laws and university

Katy continues on A8

Sex trafficking survivor heads to D.C.

Katy woman's story draws attention from McCaul, Trump administration

By Benjamin Wermund
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON – Courtney Litvak says she was a junior in a Katy high school, traumatized after she was sexually assaulted by an older boyfriend, when she met the people who groomed her for sex trafficking.

She was taking drugs, in a downward spiral. When her parents took away her phone, her new friends gave her one to use.

"I just thought that was incredibly flattering and that they were serious about helping me," she said. But the phone was also their key into her life. "It's emotional and mental access to you. ... A constant, consistent line of communication to me, to be able to reach me at all times."

By the time she was 18, Litvak says, she was brainwashed.

She walked out of her parents' house, ran down the street and got in a car with the sex traffickers who would control her life for several months, moving her from Katy to Hous-

Survivor continues on A10

Marie D. De Jesús / Staff photographer

Courtney Litvak, 21, a sex trafficking survivor, helps run ChildProof America, a nonprofit that offers trainings on how to protect kids from trafficking.

Highway contractor accused of cover-up

Lawsuit says workers tried to install warning signs after crash killed three

By Dug Begley
STAFF WRITER

Moments after a 2017 nighttime crash killed a father and two young children in a work zone along Beltway 8, Houston police watched highway construction workers hustle into the area and attempt to erect a sign warning drivers about a planned closing, according to new allegations filed in a lawsuit.

The day after the fatal crash, the construction company, Webber LLC, took dashcam video showing all the required signs in place in the work zone, which it later submitted as evidence in its defense against the lawsuit, the petition states.

"The district attorney needs to investigate that and (the Texas Department of Transportation) needs to investigate that," plaintiff's attorney Cade Bernsen said. "It is outrageous. The way they shut the highway down was messed up."

Webber, through a

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